

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM PINT BG
SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS: CONVERSATIONS WITH BANGLADESH PRESIDENT
 ZIA AND OTHER OFFICIALS

SUMMARY: WHEN I MET WITH BANGLADESH PRESIDENT ZIA ON JUNE 17
I TOLD HIM THAT AMERICANS HAD BEEN IMPRESSED BY THE PROCESS
TOWARD REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT WHICH HE HAS STARTED BUT
THAT THEY CONTINUED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT POLITICAL PRISONERS.
HE REPLIED THAT BANGLADESH BELIEVES IN HUMAN RIGHTS, WHICH
ARE IMPORTANT TO "WHAT WE ARE DOING". I HAVE MADE SIMILAR
POINTS ABOUT POLITICAL PRISONERS TO MOST OF THE OTHER OFFI-
CIALS CONCERNED WITH U.S.-BANGLADESH RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESIDENT ZIA AND I DISCUSSED HUMAN RIGHTS AT SOME LENGTH.
IN MY OPENING PRESENTATION ON U.S.- BANGLADESH BILATERIAL
RELATIONS I TOLD HIM THAT AMERICANS HAD BEEN IMPRESSED BY
HIS SUCCESS IN ESTABLISHING LEADERSHIP AND EFFECTIVE
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GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS AND BY THE PROCESS TOARD
REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT WHICH HE HAD INITIATED. I
MENTIONED THE GRADUAL DISBANDING OF THE MARTIAL LAW
GOVERNMENT, THE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, THE
ACCESS TO THE CIVIL COURTS OF DETAINEES (SEVERAL POLI-
TICAL LEADERS OBTAINED THEIR RELEASE DURING THE ELECTION
CAMPAIGN THROUGH WRITS SUBMITTED TO THE CIVIL COURTS)

AND ELECTIONS FIRST TO LOCAL BODIES AND THEN TO THE PRESIDENCY. I NOTED THAT THESE DEVELOPMENTS CONTRIBUTED TO AN ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH GOVERNMENT COULD CARRY OUT PROGRAMS TO BENEFIT ALL OF THE PEOPLE IN HIS NATION.

2. THEREAFTER, DURING AN ANALYSIS OF THE POSSIBLE AREAS OF FRICTION IN U.S.-BANGLADESH RELATIONS, I RAISED THE ISSUE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. I SAID THAT AMERICANS IN AND OUT OF GOVERNMENT WERE STILL CONCERNED ABOUT POLITICAL PRISONERS. I EXPLAINED TO HIM WHY AMERICAN FEELINGS ON THIS ISSUE ARE STRONG, NOTING OUR CONVICTION THAT IT WAS OUR DEEPLY HELD VALUES WHICH ENABLED US TO WORK OUT THE PROBLEMS OF VIETNAM AND WATERGATE. I EXPLAINED THAT PRESIDENT CARTER, A DEEPLY RELIGIOUS MAN, HELD STRONG PERSONAL CONVICTIONS ABOUT THE DIGNITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL. IT WAS LOGICAL, I SAID, THAT THESE VALUES WOULD EMERGE IN THE U.S. VIEW OF THE WORLD. I HASTENED TO POINT OUT, HOWEVER, THAT THE U.S. WOULD NOT PRESUME TO ADVISE ANY OTHER COUNTRY ON WHAT FORM OF GOVERNMENT IT SHOULD HAVE; EACH COUNTRY MUST FOLLOW ITS OWN GENIUS AND MAKE ITS OWN DECISIONS.

3. PRESIDENT ZIA LISTENED TO THIS PRESENTATION CAREFULLY, NEVER VARYING THE SYMPATHETIC SMILE WHICH TOUCHES HIS FACE AS HE LISTENS. HE REPLIED THAT HE AGREED WITH WHAT I HAD SAID. BANGLADESH BELIEVES IN HUMAN RIGHTS. CONFIDENTIAL

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THIS IS IMPORTANT TO WHAT WE ARE DOING, HE SAID. WE APPRECIATE, HE EXPLAINED, THE DIGNITY OF MAN, HIS RIGHT TO ACCESS TO THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS NEEDS AND HIS RIGHT TO MAKE REQUESTS. THE PRESIDENT SAID, WE SUPPORT YOUR HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT. APPARENTLY INTERPRETING MY REFERENCE TO THE GRADUAL DISBANDMENT OF MARTIAL LAW AS A CRITICISM, ZIA EXPLAINED THAT THIS HAD TO BE DONE GRADUALLY AS UNTIL THERE WAS A PARLIAMENT, GOVERNMENT HAD NO OTHER WAY OF FUNCTIONING. HE REFERRED DIRECTLY TO POLITICAL PRISONERS ONLY ONCE. NAMING AN AWAMI LEAGUER WHO HAD BEEN RELEASED FROM DETENTION (THE NAME WAS NOT FAMILIAR TO ME) HE SAID THAT PEOPLE HAD COME TO HIM AND TOLD HIM THAT HE HAD BEEN WRONG TO PERMIT THE RELEASE OF THIS "TROUBLE MAKER". HE HAD REPLIED THAT THIS WAS THE WAY OF DEMOCRACY AND THAT SO LONG AS THEY WERE EMBARKED ON THIS COURSE, THEY HAD NO CHOICE. THE PRESIDENT THEN AND AT OTHER TIMES DURING THE CONVERSATION SPOKE WITH PRIDE OF THE PEACEFUL AND FREE ELECTIONS WHICH HAD JUST BEEN CONCLUDED. HE TOLD ME THAT SOME OF HIS ADVISERS HAD TOLD HIM THAT IT WAS A MISTAKE TO HOLD ELECTIONS. HE TOLD THEM THAT HE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO GO AHEAD. LOOKING TO THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION SCHEDULED

FOR NEXT DECEMBER, THE PRESIDENT SAID THERE MAY BE SOME DIFFICULT TIMES IN THE INTERVENING MONTHS BUT HE GAVE NO INDICATION OF DEVIATING FROM THE COURSE UPON WHICH HE HAS EMBARKED.

4. COMMENT: I HAD ALREADY SPOKEN ABOUT U.S. CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICAL PRISONERS TO THE ADVISER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THE FOREIGN SECRETARY AND THE FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR GENERAL WHO HANDLES AMERICAN AFFAIRS. I HAVE THOUGHT IT BEST TO SPEAK ABOUT PRISONERS STILL UNDER DETENTION DESPITE THE SATISFACTORY TREND TOWARD GREATER INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM SO THAT THERE COULD BE NO POSSIBLE MISUNDERSTANDING IF PROBLEMS DEVELOP LATER. THERE IS NO QUESTION THAN MY MEANING HAS BEEN UNDERSTOOD. I
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BELIEVE THAT ZIA IS SINCERE IN HIS INTENTION TO CONTINUE THE PROCESS OF LIBERALIZATION ON WHICH HE HAS EMBARKED. I AM SURE THAT HE ALSO SEES MANY DIFFICULT HURDLES AHEAD IN THE PROCESS OF EVOLVING A REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT WITHOUT RETURNING TO THE CHAOS AND VIOLENCE INTO WHICH BANGLADESH'S PREVIOUS PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY DETERIORATED. HIS REFERENCE TO DIFFICULT TIMES AHEAD MAY WELL REFER TO THE POSSIBLE COMPROMISES HE MAY HAVE TO MAKE TO KEEP THE PROCESS ON COURSE.
SCHNEIDER

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